

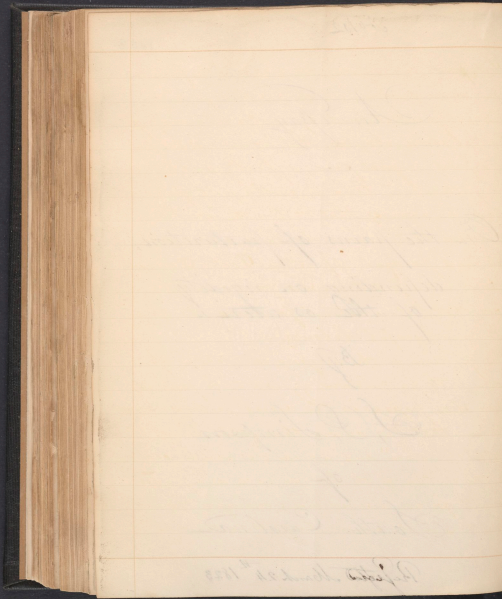
An Essay

On the pains of parturition,
depending on rigidity
of the os uteri.

By

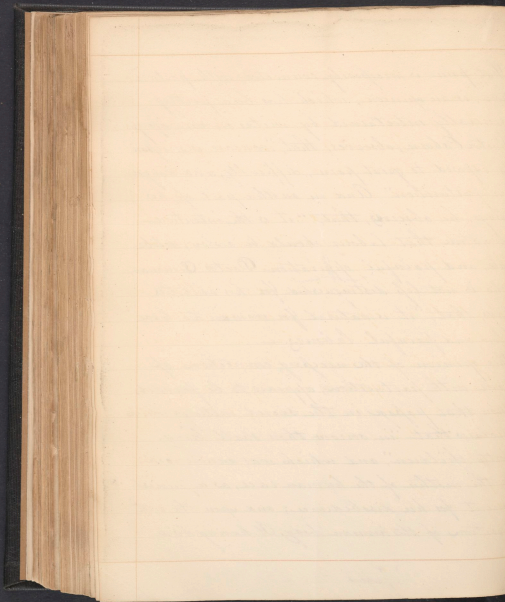
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of
South Carolina

Revised March 24th 1823



That pain is necessarily connected with parturition, is an opinion, which has been pretty generally entertained by writers on midwifery. Doctor Osborn, observes, that, "woman is necessarily exposed to great pain, difficulty, and danger in parturition." And in another part of his essays, he observes, that, "it is the intention of nature that labour should be a slow, deliberate, and painful operation. Doctor Dumanan, who is not less distinguished for his abilities, says, that, "it is natural for woman to have slow and painful labour." —

This opinion of the necessary connection of pain with parturition, appears to be founded, upon that passage in the sacred writings which declares that "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children", and which was announced to the mother of the human race, as a punishment for her disobedience; and upon the very position of the human body. It having been



supported necessary, that nature should have formed
such a structure of parts as would counteract the
effect of gravity, and prevent premature labour,
and though these ends are obtained, yet the
means she has employed create those obstacles
which impede delivery, and are unavoidably
the cause of the excruciating pains which
the unhappy sufferer is compelled to endure.

That labour is frequently a tedious and painful
operation will not be denied; but that pain
should be a necessary consequence of the form
of the human body, or that the Supreme
Being should have enjoined it as a curse upon
the female sex, appears so derogatory to the idea we
have of his goodness and wisdom, that we cannot
admit it. That a woman may bring forth in
ease, and yet not be subjected to much bodily
pain, may very readily be conceived.

When she reflects on the dangers attending on
the puerperal state, the slow and difficult

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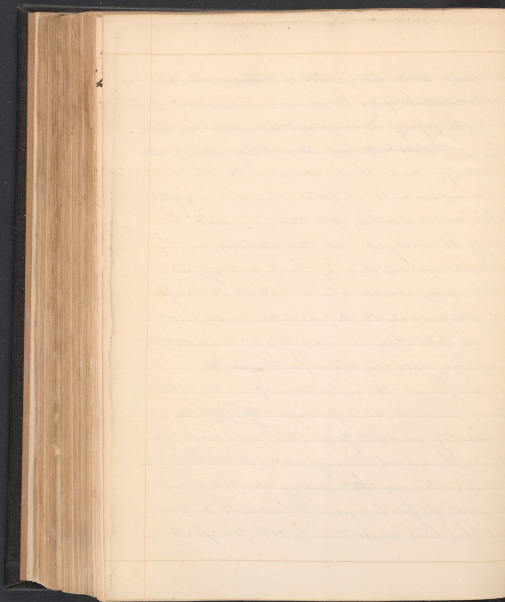
xxxvi "A Woman that is in Travail has sorrow because her

20 "time is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the
"child she remembereth no more her anguish for joy
"that a Man Child is born into the world."

recovery of some, the death of others; when she
considers that half of the human race do not
attain the age of seven years; that hardly a
half of the remainder live to years of
maturity, and that even should the spirit
of her womb be so fortunate as to escape
death in its youth, yet that it will be
exposed to dangers and temptations, in the
world, to which it may fall a prey, and
which may render life a burden to itself,
and a reproach to its parents: under circum-
stances like these, it may truly be said, that
in sorrow does she bring forth. —

But that ^{is} not the intention of nature that
labour should be a painful affliction, is
sufficiently evident from the ease and gai-
ety with which many women are deliv-
ered. Every one knows that many women are safely
delivered of full sized children, so suddenly
that they have scarce time to call for assistance.

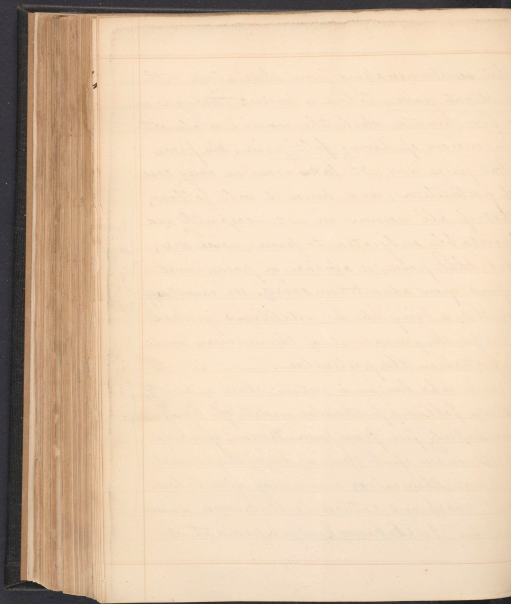
Improbable.



that something waking from their sleep with
a slight pain, labour is hurried through in
a few minutes, while the woman is almost
inconscious of having felt pain. This proves
that pain does not ~~also~~ occur in every case
of parturition; and hence it will follow,
that if all women are not necessarily and
inevitably subjected to pain, none are;
but, that pain, or a absence of pain, must
depend upon adventitious causes. We cannot sup-
pose that a being who has established general
laws for the government of the universe would
be partial in this particular.

Women who live in a certain state of society,
or who follow a particular mode of life,
are entirely free from pain. Bruce, speaking
of the women of Abyssinia, says, they do not
confine themselves over a day after labour,
but wash and return to their work imme-
diately. In Dobson's Encyclopadia it is

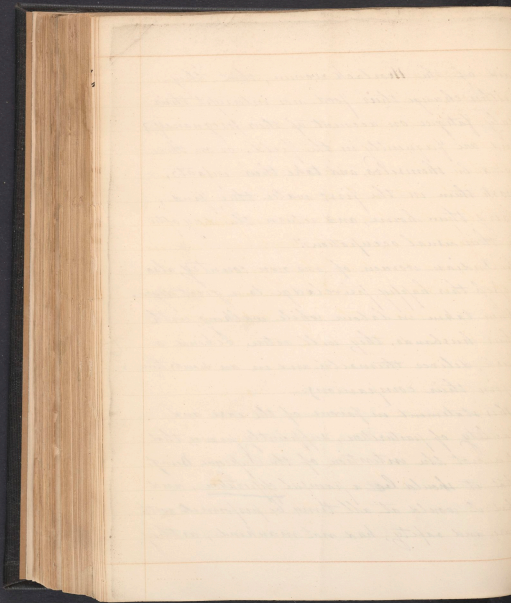
Non
Sed



said of the Morlack women, that, they,
neither change their food nor interrupt their
daily fatigue on account of their pregnancy,
and are frequently in the field, or on the
road by themselves, and take their infants,
wash them in the first water they find,
carry them home, and return the day after
to their usual occupations."

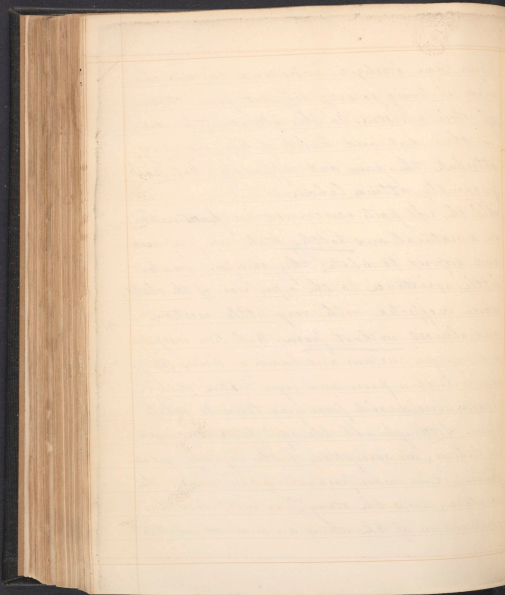
The Indian women of our own country also
possess this happy privilege to a great degree.
When taken in labour while walking with
their husbands, they will retire behind a
bush, deliver themselves, and in an hour's time
rejoin their companions. —

This statement in favour of the ease and
facility of parturition, sufficiently proves, that
it is not the intention of the Supreme Being,
that it should ~~be~~ a painful operation, and
that it would at all times be performed with
ease and safety, had not mankind, as they

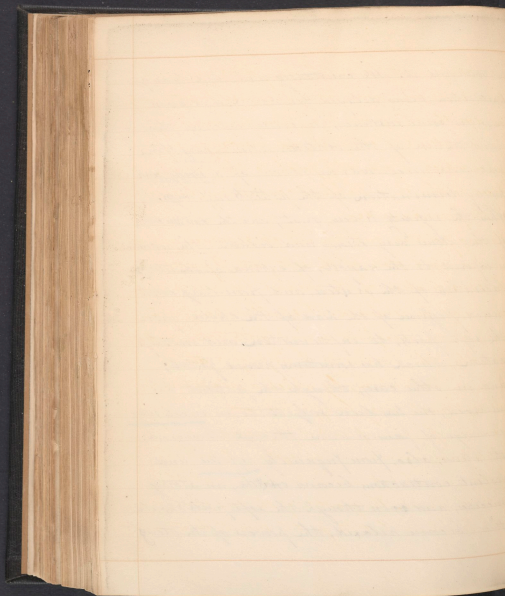


became more civilized, introduced customs and
modes of living so very different from those
of their ancestors. To this alteration, therefore,
in their diet and habits of life, we may
attribute the pain and difficulty that so
frequently attend labour.

All the soft parts concerned in parturition
in a natural and healthy state, are prepared
and disposed to dilate; they therefore make
little resistance to the expulsion of the child,
which is effected with very little exertion,
and almost without pain. But from irregular
and improper customs and habits of living, they
acquire such a firm and rigid texture that it
requires considerable force and time to dilate
them. Although all the soft parts concerned
in labour, are susceptible of this rigidity, yet in
general it is more particularly confined to the
os uteri, and the strong, ^{est} and most violent
contractions of the uterus are sometimes unable



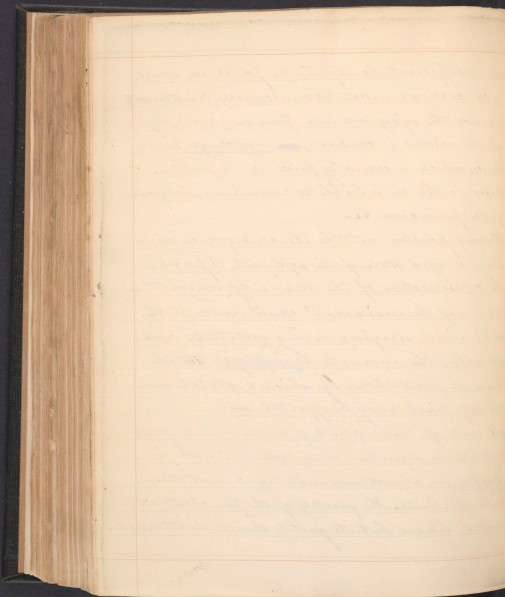
to overcome it. We constantly read and hear of
parturition being delayed for hours, and even
days, in some instances, in consequence of this
rigid texture of the os uteri, when every other
circumstance was in favour of a speedy and
happy termination of the patient's sufferings.
When the rigidity is very great, and the contracting
of the uterus very strong and violent, the woman
is exposed to the danger, of rupture of the uterus,
laceration of the os uteri, and from long conti-
nued pressure of the head of the child upon
the soft parts, to inflammation and mortifi-
cation, which has sometimes proved fatal;
and in other cases, though the patient has
survived, she has been subject to an involuntary
discharge of feces or urine through the vagina:
the uterus, also, from frequently repeated and
violent contractions becomes exhausted, an atony
succeeds, and even though the soft parts should
then become relaxed, the powers of the uterus



are insufficient to expell the foetus, in some such cases we must have recourse to instruments, nor does the injury, and here, from an inability of the uterus to contract, ~~an~~ hemorrhage supervene, which is generally fatal to the patient. Added to this she is liable to convulsions, laceration of the perinaeum &c.

Having pointed out the ill consequences arising from a rigid state of the soft parts, I proceed to the consideration of the means by which these evils may be remedied. I shall notice, first, such as are necessary during gestation. And, secondly, the means to be employed at the time of parturition, by which a dilatation of the soft parts may be effected.

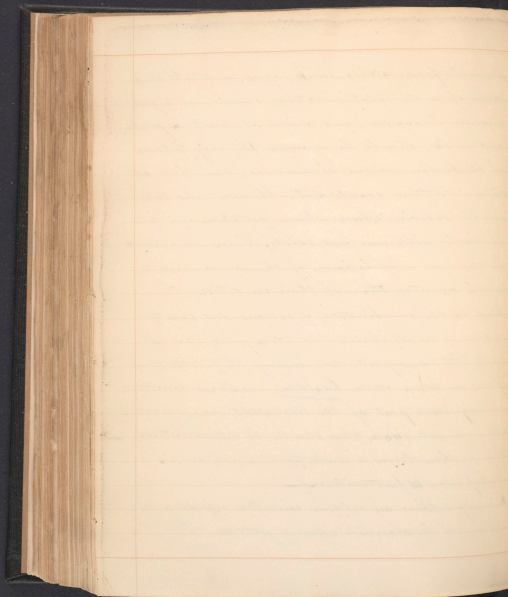
As most of the complaints of pregnancy, arise from a plethoric disposition of the system, it will be proper in almost every instance to meet them with the lancet. The quantity of the food should not only be lessened, but its quality should be attended to.



Animal food, strong drink, spices, and all substances of a stimulating nature, should, in a great measure, be avoided, and a diet of fruit, vegetables and milk, should be enjoined. The easy labours of the Indian women of America, have been ascribed to their scanty diet. Women who take much exercise before uterine gestation and labour, generally, with ease and safety. Hence we account for the more easy labours of the women residing in the country, than of those in cities.

And to the combination of exercise and scanty diet, may be attributed the little pain and difficulty attending parturition among the female slaves of the southern states. Positive nursing constitutes an important part of the treatment during gestation. As a general rule, they should be administered two or three times a week, for a month or six weeks previous to parturition.

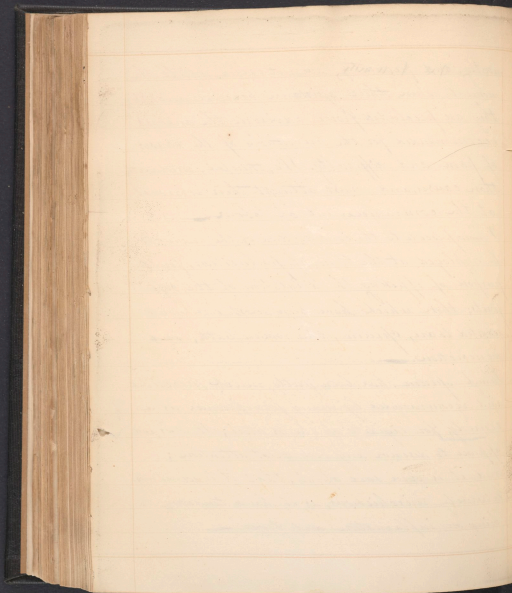
But as practitioners are seldom consulted respecting the regimen to be observed during gestation, and few



antly, and frequently, are not called until the
moment when their assistance becomes necessary,
they are precluded from advising the means
recommended for the prevention of the causes
of pain and difficulty. We, therefore, meet with
those causes, and must attempt their removal
at the commencement of labor.

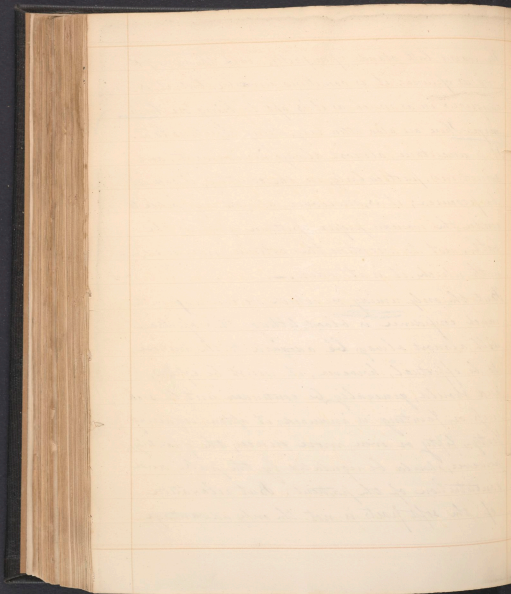
I now proceed to the consideration of the means to
be employed at the time of parturition, for the
purpose of affecting the dilatation of the soft
parts; those which have been most commonly
used to are, opium, the warm bath, and
venesection.

Though opium has been pretty much prescribed
and recommended by many practitioners as a
remedy for rigidity of the os uteri; It does not
appear to deserve any very great attention;
and it is even said of it, that it is sometimes
extremely mischievous, as it has a tendency to
bring on inflammation and fever.



The reason both stands upon pretty much the same footing as opium; it is sometimes serviceable, but it is dangerous in as much as it is apt to bring on hemorrhage. There are also other very strong objections to it. It is uncertain, almost always inconvenient, and sometimes, particularly in the country, it can not be procured; it is, moreover, almost impossible to render the woman proper opisthana when in the bath, not to mention the extreme insalubrity with which it is attended. —

But the only remedy on which we can rely with much confidence is blood letting; this of itself will almost always be adequate to the purpose, to be effectual, however, it must be copious, and should, generally be continued until sickness or fainting is induced; it often requiring forty, fifty or even more ounces; the quantity, however, should be regulated by the pulse and constitution of the patient. But relaxation of the soft parts is not the only advantage



derived from blood-letting. By the use of this
remedy, we prevent all those accidents which
have been enumerated as arising from rigidity
of the soft parts. It facilitates the delivery of
the placenta, by preventing spasmodic contraction
of the uterus. It prevents after pains, puerperal
fever and mania. In puerperal presen-
tations, blood-letting, by removing the
spasmodic action of the uterus, and relaxing
the parts, very much facilitates the intro-
duction of the hand, and delivery of the
child —

I cannot depart from this university without acknow-
ledging my obligations to its medical professors.
To them all I now offer my very sincere thanks.
That the university of Pennsylvania may long
continue to flourish, is the fervent wish of one
whose study, and ambition it shall ever be to
carry into effect the excellent, and he believes the
first principle of medicine to be, inhibit it —

Oct 1890